

PERFORM THE TASK

How do we respond to historic events?



You will read:

- ▶ AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT
The Battle of Balaclava
- ▶ AN INFORMATIONAL TEXT
Narrative Poems
- ▶ A NARRATIVE POEM
"The Charge of the Light Brigade"

You will write:

- ▶ A LITERARY ANALYSIS
How does "The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson affect your understanding of the real events behind the poem?

Part 1: Read Sources

Source 1: Eyewitness Account

The Battle of Balaclava

AS YOU READ Pay attention to the details and historical facts in this newspaper article, written by William Howard Russell on October 25, 1854. Note how this eyewitness account of the charge of the Light Brigade during the Battle of Balaclava lends historical accuracy and meaning to Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem. Record comments or questions about the text in the side margins.

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Background

Although the Crimean War, which erupted in 1853 with the Russian Empire on one side and Britain, France, the Kingdom of Sardinia, and the Ottoman Empire on the other is now only a dim memory, what is remembered is one tragic battle of the war—the brave cavalry charge of the British Light Brigade into Russian fire—an action made famous by Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem. Through a miscommunication of orders, the Light Brigade of about 600 horsemen began a headlong charge into a valley near the city of Balaclava, in the Crimea, on October 25, 1854, with the idea of capturing some Russian artillery. Unknown to the cavalry, the valley was surrounded by Russian troops on three sides, and an estimated 278 of the British Light Brigade were killed or wounded.

When news of the disaster hit London by way of the newspaper account of the charge written by William Howard Russell, the first true foreign correspondent, it caused a national scandal that prompted Tennyson to write his poem. An eyewitness to the battle, here is Russell's account for the London Times as the Light Brigade begins its charge into "the valley of Death."

The Battle Of Balaclava

The Times, 14 November 1854
reported by William Howard Russell

They swept proudly past, glittering in the morning sun in all the pride and splendour of war. We could hardly believe the evidence of our senses! Surely that handful of men were not going to charge an army in position? Alas! it was but too true—their desperate valour knew no bounds, and far indeed was it removed from its so-called better part—discretion.

They advanced in two lines, quickening their pace as they closed towards the enemy. A more fearful spectacle was never witnessed than by those who, without the power to aid, beheld
10 their heroic countrymen rushing to the arms of death. At the distance of 1200 yards the whole line of the enemy belched forth, from thirty iron mouths, a flood of smoke and flame, through which hissed the deadly balls. Their flight was marked by instant gaps in our ranks, by dead men and horses, by steeds flying wounded or riderless across the plain. The first line was broken—it was joined by the second, they never halted or checked their speed an instant. With diminished ranks, thinned by those thirty guns, which the Russians had laid with the most deadly accuracy, with a halo of flashing steel above
20 their heads, and with a cheer which was many a noble fellow's death cry, they flew into the smoke of the batteries; but ere they were lost from view, the plain was strewed with their bodies and with the carcasses of horses. They were exposed to an oblique fire from the batteries on the hills on both sides, as well as to a direct fire of musketry.

Through the clouds of smoke we could see their sabres flashing as they rode up to the guns and dashed between them, cutting down the gunners as they stood. . . . We saw them riding through the guns, as I have said; to our delight we saw
30 them returning, after breaking through a column of Russian

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infantry, and scattering them like chaff, when the flank fire of the battery on the hill swept them down, scattered and broken as they were. Wounded men and dismounted troopers flying towards us told the sad tale. . . . At the very moment when they were about to retreat, an enormous mass of lancers was hurled upon their flank. Colonel Shewell, of the 8th Hussars, saw the danger, and rode his few men straight at them, cutting his way through with fearful loss. The other regiments turned and engaged in a desperate encounter. With courage too great
40 almost for credence, they were breaking their way through the columns which enveloped them, when there took place an act of atrocity without parallel in the modern warfare of civilized nations. The Russian gunners, when the storm of cavalry passed, returned to their guns. They saw their own cavalry mingled with the troopers who had just ridden over them, and to the eternal disgrace of the Russian name the miscreants poured a murderous volley of grape and canister on the mass of struggling men and horses, mingling friend and foe in one
50 common ruin. It was as much as our Heavy Cavalry Brigade could do to cover the retreat of the miserable remnants of that band of heroes as they returned to the place they had so lately quitted in all the pride of life.

At twenty-five to twelve not a British soldier, except the dead and dying, was left in front of these bloody Muscovite guns.

Close Read

Reread lines 1–10. How does Russell’s account use descriptive details and figurative language to portray the cavalymen about to charge? Cite specific evidence from the text in your response.

Source 2: Informational Text

Narrative Poems

by Amelia Johnson

A narrative poem is a poem that tells a story. Narrative poetry was originally inspired by traditional epics and ballads, which are long poems that also tell a story. These epics and ballads were often based on actual events. However, these events are presented in a way that makes them seem larger than life.

Because a narrative poem tells a story, it emphasizes plot and action, much as a prose short story or a novel would. The setting and the characters' reactions are also important elements. However, it also contains poetic techniques such as
10 rhythm and rhyme that are found in other forms of poetry.

In the nineteenth century, narrative poetry was very popular in the United States and in Europe. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the most famous American poet of his day, wrote numerous poems that told a story. Many of them, including "Paul Revere's Ride," were based on true events. However, the poems did not always depict those events with absolute historical accuracy.

Newspapers also were available to greater numbers of people during this time, and they became a source of subject
20 matter for narrative poems. In the case of "The Charge of the Light Brigade," Alfred, Lord Tennyson, the well-known British poet, was inspired to write his poem by the news reporting of William Howard Russell, the first modern foreign correspondent to witness and report on the actual events of a

AS YOU READ Focus on the aspects of narrative poetry that make it different from other kinds of poetry. Record comments or questions about the text in the side margins.

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war. Russell's dramatic eyewitness accounts of the Crimean War, which he wrote for *The London Illustrated News*, were also printed in *The Times*. His dispatches were read by so many people that the events of the charge of the Light Brigade and the tragic death of so many British cavalry caused a national scandal in Britain. Both Russell's eyewitness account and Tennyson's poem captured the tragedy of the doomed charge.

However, the way the newspaper article and the poem present these events is very different. Tennyson's narrative poem includes elements that are found in short stories such as plot, characters, and setting. In addition, Tennyson includes these poetic techniques:

- Rhythm is the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry.
- Rhyme is the repetition of sounds at the ends of words.
- 40 • Repetition is the use of a word, phrase, or line more than once.

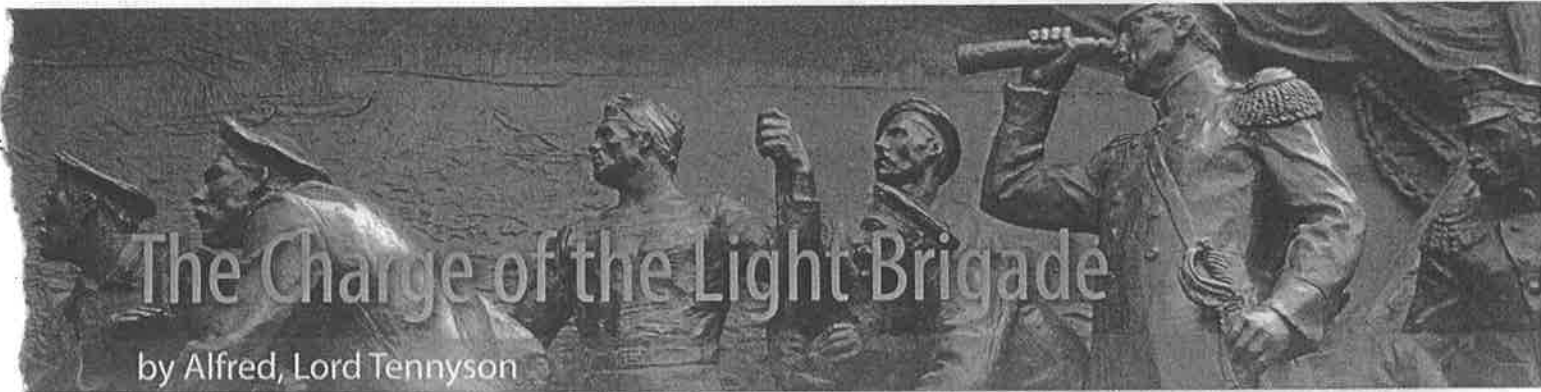
As you read Tennyson's poem, look for these elements of narrative poetry and the effect they create.

Discuss and Decide

Think about the characteristics of a narrative poem described in the text.

Why might a military battle be a good topic for a narrative poem? Cite text evidence in your discussion.

Source 3: Narrative Poem



The Charge of the Light Brigade

by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

- Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
- 5 “Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!” he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
- “Forward, the Light Brigade!”
- 10 Was there a man dismay’d?
Not tho’ the soldier knew
Some one had blunder’d:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
- 15 Theirs but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

AS YOU READ Note the features of narrative poetry that the poem contains. Be aware of the similarities and differences between the poem and William Howard Russell’s eyewitness account. Underline details that contribute to your understanding of the narrative text and reflect the facts behind the poem. Record comments or questions in the side margins.

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- Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
20 Cannon in front of them
 Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
25 Into the mouth of Hell
 Rode the six hundred.
- Flash'd all their sabers bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air,
Sabring the gunners there,
30 Charging an army, while
 All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
35 Reel'd from the saber-stroke
 Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not,
Not the six hundred.

Close Read

Reread lines 1–26. Note the use of repetition in these lines. What ideas do these repeated phrases emphasize? Cite specific text evidence in your response.

- Cannon to right of them,
40 Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
 Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
45 They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
 Left of six hundred.
- 50 When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
 All the world wonder'd.
Honor the charge they made!
Honor the Light Brigade,
55 Noble six hundred!



Discuss and Decide

With a small group, discuss which specific details are in both the eyewitness account and the narrative poem. Why might these details have been included by both writers? Cite specific text evidence in your discussion.

Respond to Questions on Step 3 Sources

These questions will help you think about the texts you have read. Use your notes and refer to the sources in order to answer the questions. Your answers to these questions will help you write your literary analysis.

- 1 **Prose Constructed-Response** A plot is a feature of all narrative poems. Summarize the plot of "The Charge of the Light Brigade."

- 2 **Prose Constructed-Response** How does the use of rhyme and repetition contribute to the meaning of the poem? What ideas are emphasized? Cite text evidence in your response.

- 3 **Prose Constructed-Response** What are the historical facts of "The Battle of Balaclava" and "The Charge of the Light Brigade"? How are they similar? What are the differences? Cite specific evidence from the two texts.
